

*Ordinary*  
Epiphany 4C  
February 3, 2019  
Trinity Bixby  
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[I Corinthians 13 \(VOICE\)](#)  
[Luke 4:22-30](#)

About twenty-five years ago, I was living in Jakarta, Indonesia, and learning to play baseball. Now, baseball is not a usual pastime in Jakarta – mostly, it’s played by folks in North and South America, as well as Japan and the Philippines. But my school had three baseball diamonds as part of its campus, and they were holding a spring-break intensive that was... intense. Calisthenics, running miles as fast as we could, batting drills, and scrimmages were all part of the program. The entire campus, all 46 acres of it, was surrounded by medium-height walls – about four and a half feet tall, just enough that middle-school me couldn’t really see over them. In the middle of one of the scrimmages, I heard a loud ruckus behind me. At the time, I was out in left field – rather literally -and when you’re there, you don’t expect to hear anything behind you. Once play stopped, I turned around to find a few Indonesian school-children who had covered the top of the fence with old towels and were sitting on it, watching us play. They were jeering, and though I didn’t understand exactly what they were saying, it was clear they were being less than complementary. After a short while of this – playing ball, hearing yelling from behind, and so on – campus security showed up and forced the Indonesian kids back over the wall. I couldn’t help but be struck that this was a culture-clash moment – we were engaged in an ordinary day of playing sports, yet we had walled off kids who might have enjoyed playing if they were given a chance to do so. It was a far cry from ordinary, as it turned out – a far cry from sandlot ball, where anyone who wanted to could show up and play ball. We were lost in the ordinary, unable to see how disconnected and separated our ordinary had become.

As a middle-schooler, of course, I didn’t have much choice in the matter. I didn’t have the power to tear down the walls, or to invite the kids to play with us. I

hadn't grown up there, and I left Jakarta before highschool – not a long time to establish relationships with the local community. In our gospel story today, Jesus experiences a sense of disconnection with his own hometown, in his own home synagogue. He had just finished speaking about the scriptures being fulfilled when the people – some of whom clearly know him and his family – demand that he produce signs (or miracles) like those he had done in Capernaum. To avoid this, Jesus reminds them of a couple of proverbs, and stories of prophets' experiences. Just as Elijah and Elisha did not help all the people at home – indeed, helping “foreigners” instead – Jesus' subtext is that he will not heal people in his hometown, instead giving preference to foreigners, to gentiles. Then, the people of Nazareth – at least most of those gathered to hear Jesus speak – try to run Jesus off a cliff. They don't manage to run him off a cliff, but they do run him out of town.

Here again, the people are lost in the ordinary. They know Jesus – or think they do – and when Jesus refuses to satisfy their jealous demands for signs and miracles – they get angry. In their world, the ordinary thing to do is to help your family first, then *your* town, and then maybe others, if you've a mind to. Jesus is trying to show them that it ought to be ordinary to help the people who need the most help, first. Maybe, too, he's trying to say – don't compare yourself to Capernaum – why does my helping people there affect you at all?

When Christians have read this story, the traditional response has been something like, “Those fools! We would love to hear Jesus for ourselves – they shouldn't have thrown him out!” However, we're much more like the people of Nazareth than like Jesus and his disciples. We have a pretty good grasp on who we think Jesus is – we've spent years working on our relationship with God and with each other. In society today, many people are so familiar, so casual about Jesus that they will exclaim his name in times of surprise or stress. His message isn't brand new – but familiar, ordinary even. We treat Jesus like he's part of the background of our society. It's like we're saying, “Hey, isn't that God's son? Oh yeah, we've played dominoes together. Oh yeah, we've hung out on Sunday mornings. He's just that guy, y'know?” When we take Jesus for granted – when we treat him as an ordinary

part of our lives – we forget how revolutionary, how important it is to not just know Jesus – to not just know God – to not just know the Holy Spirit – but to act in the love that God shows us.

If we're like the congregation in Nazareth, then we're also like the church at Corinth. When Paul wrote the words in I Corinthians 13, he was writing to specifically address problems in that congregation. People who were so used to the ordinary way of the world that it felt natural to boast about their accomplishments – to show off their spiritual gifts, to claim that they were better than others because of the gifts they had been given. Paul wrote about Love to show them a different way – a Way that followed Jesus' example. Love is not about good feelings, about acting in the moment – but about acting in ways that benefit others more than yourself. It's a bit obscured in English translations, but each one of these verbs, these things that Love does are active words – “Love acts with patience towards people, instead of taking revenge. Love offers sweet kindness to all. Love does not act out of jealousy. Love does not boast. Love doesn't puff you up.” And so on. Love acts – Love is not simply *felt*.

We set apart time for worship with God on the “Lord's Day” – on a day we experience Sabbath. We are meant to study Jesus' Way of Love, and act accordingly – not just on Sunday, but throughout the week. Yet, even this day set apart becomes an ordinary experience for us, dulled into insignificance in our lives. The key, then, is to not take God for granted. To seek God's influence in the world – in terms of our scripture today, to not wait for Jesus to come to Nazareth if we want to see signs, but to go to Capernaum when Jesus is there. To act in Love in all things – to reach out to the kids on the wall, and invite them to play. To experience the wonder of life and love each day like we've never experienced it before. To not boast of our accomplishments – or seek out like-minded people – but to be open to the new experiences, to the differences we find even from one town to another. To work not just for our own benefit, but for the benefit of others. To realize that though we are children of God, we are called to be adults in the world, who can effect change – even small change – by our actions and words.

Let us work together to be disciples of Jesus. Let us work together to live in Love – not the love of easy sentiment, but the love of sacrifice and difficulty. The love that causes growth, that tears down walls, that holds your well-being as important. Love that stretches not just to those who look or sound like you, who think or believe as you do, but love for all of our beautiful differences, where God is praised without coercion, when laughter bubbles up from shared experiences, and we do not run anyone out of town. In the end, we must be like Jesus, who took his message not only – and not even *primarily* to his hometown, but to the rest of the world. Instead of merely welcoming the stranger, Jesus became the stranger, and makes the ordinary extraordinary through the Way of Love. So may all of us, too.

May the Spirit guide you when you are lost in the ordinary. May Jesus' love lead your actions. May God bless you to be a blessing in the world. Amen.